



State of Michigan E-mail Storage Options

E-mail software is a communication tool that is not designed for record storage and retention. However, employees need to retain some e-mail messages as records to document agency activities. Employees have the following options for storing their e-mail: printing to paper and filing the message with other related paper records, saving the message on their computer hard drive or a network drive, and filing the message in the e-mail archive component of the e-mail software. There are advantages and disadvantages associated with each of these options. Regardless of where the e-mail message is stored, it needs to be maintained in an organized recordkeeping system to facilitate access and retrieval of the record. The Records Management Services can provide tips about good recordkeeping practices.

Option/ Function	Shared Access	Centralized Storage	Record Declaration	Maintains Contextual Metadata	Electronic Backup	Electronic Storage
Paper Printout	X	X	X			
Save As...	X	X	X		X	X
E-mail Archive				X	X	X

E-mail Archive

- Messages that are stored on the hard drive are not backed up (backed up network drives are a storage option for e-mail archives).
- It's too easy--most users will save most everything automatically, without considering whether it is a record and whether it should be saved.
- As the archive grows, regardless of where it is physically stored, it will cause space and performance problems.
- Messages will only be accessible by the account owner. [Technically messages will be stored on a drive that is accessible by others, but if the user is not logged into the e-mail system the file names will be meaningless, and the files open as meaningless characters.]
- Messages will not be stored with other paper and electronic records that document the same business process. Users will be required to search multiple locations to access a complete record of the business process.
- Messages remain linked to their attachment(s) and transactional metadata.
- If a FOIA request or a discovery order is received, the person handling the response will have to expend additional resources to access messages in the archive, if they even know that relevant messages exist there.
- Most users will not review the messages in their archive and will not purge them on a periodic basis. If they are purged, it probably will not be done in compliance with an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.

Save As...

- Since nothing happens automatically, users have to think and decide whether the message (and attachments) is a record that should be retained. This will reduce the volume of messages that are stored as electronic documents.
- Users select which directory the message is stored in, and will be able to store the message and/or attachment(s) alongside other electronic files that document the business process. Users can also give the message a meaningful file name that facilitates retrieval.
- If the user selects to store the message and/or attachment(s) on a network drive, they will be backed up.
- If the user selects to store the message and/or attachment(s) on a shared drive, multiple staff in the agency will be able to access it. The staff could also reduce duplicate storage of messages and attachments, if individuals are assigned responsibility for filing documents on behalf of the group.
- The physical link between the message and its attachment(s) will be broken. However, they can remain linked intellectually through naming conventions.
- It is easier for FOIA and litigation coordinators to find records when everything related to the business process is stored together.
- Most users do not review the electronic records stored in their directories and purge them on a periodic basis. If they are purged, it usually is not done in compliance with an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.

Paper Printout

- Since nothing happens automatically, users have to think and decide whether the message (and attachments) is a record that should be retained. This will reduce the volume of messages that are stored as paper.
- Users select which file the message is stored in, and will be able to store the message and/or attachment(s) alongside other records that document the business process.
- The physical link between the message and its attachment(s) will be broken if the attachment(s) are not stapled to the message.
- Multiple staff in the agency will be able to access the records from the paper filing system.
- It is easier for FOIA and litigation coordinators to find records when everything related to the business process is stored together.
- Many employees are familiar with the procedures for storing paper records at the State Records Center and for destroying paper records in accordance with an approved Retention and Disposal Schedule.

For More Information

Records Management Services

Michigan Historical Center

Department of History, Arts and Libraries

(517) 335-9132

<http://www.michigan.gov/recordsmanagement/>